The Challenges Faced By International Students In The United States

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Abstract

In the past two years, the number of international students applying to study at U.S. universities increased by 8%. The purpose of the study is to discuss the challenges facing international students in the United States. While international students benefit from university education, they face adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences, the loss of social support, discrimination, language barriers, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and academic adjustment. This study was qualitative and involved students from different countries who were registered at U.S. universities. Understanding the differences and experiences of international students from different cultures can help Rowan University address integration issues more effectively. The study helps raise awareness of the adjustment needs of international students and can help them achieve success.

Introduction

This study examined the factors that affect international students when they move to the United States to study. International students in American higher education play an essential role, as their diverse perspectives help internationalize American education and improve the quality of education, research, the community, and the economy. The literature explains the challenges international students may face when they come to new universities; for example, some university professors seek to stimulate the learning experience and encourage participation in the classroom and beyond. International students can experience adjustment difficulties when they encounter American teaching methods (Almurideef, 2016). While international students receive educational experience in the United States, they make significant sacrifices by leaving their homes, families, and social and financial resources in their countries.

In addition to language and cultural issues, these students have to obtain visas. They often struggle to support themselves financially in the United States and work with American colleagues to achieve social and academic cohesion. They may have grown up in a foreign country with different educational and work models, which can create differences in learning culture. Because international students make these sacrifices, U.S. higher education institutions should do everything possible to support them and help them achieve their goals.

International students have provided considerable information about the problems they encounter at American colleges and universities. A significant amount of university experience occurs outside lessons, and social integration can be a problem for international students. It is not only the academic adviser's responsibility to enrol students in classes but also to encourage them to participate in university life and gain information about the curriculum (Bauer & Picciotto, 2013). There are many ways in which universities can meet the needs of international students. These include developing a global philosophy, improving intercultural understanding, and increasing sensitivity to the experiences of international students in higher education institutions in the United States.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study examines the experiences of international students attending universities in the United States. International students face many challenges in higher education, including adapting to new conditions, academic pressure, financial difficulties, language barriers, and loneliness. These issues need to be studied carefully. One major problem is that English is not the first language of many international students. English proficiency is important because it supports social success, and establishing connections with other students can affect academic relationships. International students who are academically successful in their home countries may still experience academic and social difficulties in the United States. Therefore, it is necessary to help international students integrate into university academic and social activities.

1.2 Study Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the problems experienced by international students studying in the United States. The research focuses not only on understanding the experiences of international students but also on helping them become more successful. This study can support the development of programs that provide international students with assistance that meets both general and individual needs.

Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Issues

When international students arrive in the United States from several countries, they find themselves immersed in a new and entirely different culture, and this comes as a "culture shock" for many students. Culture shock involves severe, intense, and frequently overwhelming feelings of irritability and homesickness that people may experience when they reside in a new country and face new customs, new people, a modern society, new norms, and a new language. The United States is often referred to as a melting pot, with millions of people from around the globe belonging to several

cultures and traditions in one place, making American culture unique and distinct from others. The culture and customs of everyday life in the United States, whether in a classroom, a dorm setting, or a restaurant, are different from those of other countries such as Japan, Spain, and China. For instance, people bow when they meet a new person in Japan to show respect and acknowledgement, but this would be unusual in the United States. Also, in Spain, people may casually touch each other in busy or public areas without the intention of harm or harassment, but in the United States personal space is highly valued, and people may not consider it appropriate to be touched by strangers.

International students not only have to face culture shock but also experience severe homesickness. New places, new people, new friends, new food, and a new study system all at once make it difficult for international students to adjust, as they have to expand their networks, make contacts with new people, and blend in with local people whether they want to or not. This is necessary to progress successfully in their academic careers and benefit from educational and professional opportunities.

2.2 Financial Issues

In addition to cultural challenges, financial difficulties can also be overwhelming in the United States, and international students have to deal with them as well. The tuition fees of public colleges are high and are even higher if the college is private. Not only are tuition fees a major problem for international students, but they also have to pay living expenses, food and board costs, rent, medical bills, and unexpected expenses in a foreign country. With so many expenses, they have to carefully determine how they are going to manage their finances in the United States.

2.3 Social Issues

At the social level, international students face difficulties understanding and interacting with people who are different from those in their home countries. Social situations and the etiquette required to behave appropriately in specific situations in the United States may seem strange or unfamiliar to international students. Initially, they can feel lonely and intimidated while interacting with people around them. Social situations in a foreign country do not involve only classroom settings because many social experiences happen outside the classroom. Therefore, it can be difficult for international students to integrate socially, for instance, at part-time jobs, social organizations, and academic clubs. They may feel shy and uncertain when they have to meet and approach new people and make friends.

Furthermore, the language barrier is a significant hurdle for international students, even when most of them have scored well on the TOEFL and IELTS exams. However, it can still be difficult to use a new language in daily life and in multiple social situations with new people, such as expressing opinions in classrooms and interacting with classmates and teachers. Also, because of communication difficulties, they may hesitate and often fail to take leadership roles in academic settings and workplaces (Rice, 2017).

2.4 Academic Issues

Academic challenges can also become severe for international students in a distant foreign country because they may be accustomed to different educational, learning, and grading systems. With so many other barriers, it can be difficult for them to adjust to their educational institutions and focus entirely on their studies. Classroom and language expectations may be different for international students, and they do not always readily accept and adjust to these expectations. American professors appreciate interactive sessions during classes, differences of opinion, and a direct approach, which can be frightening for new international students who are accustomed to more formal classes, routinely agreeing with professors, and not knowing how to speak up.

Moreover, the U.S. educational system is different from that of many other countries because it includes a semester system based on both face-to-face and online learning. Almost all courses and classes require students to complete assignments, write research papers, post discussions, follow netiquette, regularly participate in class, make presentations, and take multiple tests and exams, all within strict deadlines. This can prove nerve-wracking and frightening to a new international student who has not experienced something like this before in their academic environment. Writing research papers, various types of essays, assignments, homework, following different citation styles, providing references, and following plagiarism rules are regular requirements in the college and university system of the United States, and it can take stressful months or years for international students to learn and cope with these challenges. Some international students may perceive certain forms of collaboration as sharing rather than cheating, and it can be difficult for them to understand the concept of plagiarism, while many native students are already accustomed to academic-integrity expectations from their schooling in America (Banjong & Olson, 2016).

2.5 Language Issues

Language difficulties are a significant problem for international students. For example, English-language education has received increasing attention in China and has become more widespread, especially in writing, reading, and speaking. Some Chinese students may still have difficulty with English grammar and vocabulary. Studies show that English plays an essential role in completing work successfully in an English-speaking environment. Students who are less fluent in English may face problems with peer-group integration and lower levels of academic performance.

These problems may create greater risks for international students who already experience academic difficulties. American colleges and universities require international students to take English-proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS to evaluate their English-language skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Language barriers can adversely affect friendships with Americans (Cheng & Erben, 2012). Some international students have difficulty establishing comfortable relationships with Americans because they have trouble understanding some American students, while some native speakers may be impatient when listening to international students who are less fluent in English.

Most studies focus on English for academic purposes. English also helps international students build social relationships with other students and influences their academic performance. One study suggests that English-language support in academic classes can increase the performance of international students. Saudi Arabian students reported concerns about studying in English and about reading, writing, or speaking in class (Heyn, 2013).

Language-support strategies focus on reducing language and academic barriers for international students from Asia. Such strategies can help international students practice English in everyday life, watch television, and talk to American people in cafeterias or supermarkets. International students can also be encouraged to share their interests and experiences and interact with others in order to improve their language skills and learning efficiency.

Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study was qualitative. It consisted of structured interviews. The sample size was 15-20 international students, and they were asked about their undergraduate and graduate study experiences in the United States. They answered the interview questions and shared their experiences, showing how international students faced and resolved various challenges. The interview questions were open-ended and identical for the participants, providing them with an opportunity to talk about their experiences in detail. The students were provided with complete information about the process of the study, and their consent was required for participation. Permission was also obtained to videotape their interviews and include clips in the final short film. After the interviews, the data were analyzed to determine what to include in the short film and how to present it.

The questionnaire was based on 15-25 open-ended questions. The interview questions asked students about their general demographic information, including name, age, prospective career field, university name, nationality, and the name of the program in which they were enrolled. Questions were asked about the education system in the participant's home country to identify differences between the U.S. education system and the education systems of students' home countries. Some questions also asked students for suggestions for prospective international students and about successful coping strategies that participants had used to overcome challenges. The students' answers were then analyzed and carefully selected for inclusion in the final movie. It was expected that significant differences would be reported between the education systems in international students' home countries and the U.S. education system.

The valuable comments gathered from international students showed why international students came to the United States in search of high-quality education and how they dealt with issues and problems. This movie will add value to my theatre-film studies and give me insight into the movie-

making process. It has enhanced my experience as a student making a movie and helped me learn what efforts are required to make one effectively. It has given me the advantage of learning about real situations and the efforts necessary to make a film, as well as how a person can deal with problems and issues in a film project. It has also provided me with experience interacting with different students and communicating with them effectively. The study used active communication styles to encourage students to share their problems and experiences with me.

3.2 Research Process

The data-collection process started with interviews of international students from India, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Mexico, and Morocco. The interviews covered financial issues, academic issues, social issues, and cultural issues faced by international students before and after they came to the United States. Most of their answers were similar, but some differed. For example, regarding financial issues, most international students received financial help from their families, while some Libyan and Saudi Arabian students had full scholarships from their governments.

Research Findings

Following the collection of demographic information from participants, the study asked about the strengths of international students. There was broad agreement that they were motivated, confident, focused, and successful. Most respondents described these characteristics. Many of the international students were graduate students. The interviews revealed that financial issues are significant for international students, many of whom receive help from their families in order to apply for a visa and support their studies. Two students had full scholarships from their governments. The time from applying for a visa until receiving approval ranged from one to two months. All students prepared themselves before coming to the United States by studying English and saving money. Academic difficulties were also among the significant challenges for international students. Results showed that students discussed academic goals and intended to continue their education, with some aspiring to become professors. The admission requirements included the GRE/GAT, IELTS speaking test, and TOEFL. Some students from Nigeria and Mexico reported that they could obtain admission without those requirements.

The strengths that participants most often identified included intelligence, strong analytical capabilities, an understanding of their work and scholarship, motivation, work ethic, integrity, competence, and cultural diversity. Students from India and China were described as particularly strong in some of these areas. One professor commented on their “worldviews,” noting that they seemed to have broader experiences than some other students and often spoke multiple languages. Some instructors also emphasized flexibility, adaptability, and respect.

Participants were asked about the problems and challenges faced by international students. They were also asked to consider, on a scale from 1 to 5, how strongly various factors contributed to

difficulties in international-student classes. The factors included:

- English-language proficiency,
- learning and work strategies,
- cultural differences,
- lack of familiarity with the university campus and available resources,
- insufficient prerequisites for classes,
- differences in teaching methods or teaching practices.

Culture was not reported as the greatest challenge for all international students. However, they did experience difficulty bonding with others and adapting to American routines. Many students appreciated friendships with Americans and found them helpful. Language was one of the noticeable challenges identified in this section of the research. Socialization was another variable discussed. According to respondents, it was sometimes difficult for international students to socialize with their classmates because of cultural differences. Regarding speaking, writing, and reading, students mentioned that they all had accents but that their accents did not affect their reading and writing. All of them agreed that they experienced a period of culture shock when they first arrived in the United States of America.

Higher education is challenging for many students, and moving to a new country is not easy and can cause many problems. This study examined difficulties that are unique to international students in higher education in the United States and practices that can improve academic performance. The conclusions emphasized the importance of a robust support system for international students, as these students have special needs and face problems that differ from those of their American counterparts. Although many students were satisfied with the general experience of American universities, it was noted that students wanted to learn more about housing, academic programs, job opportunities, culture, and language before they started their studies at American universities. Therefore, orientation can play an essential role in introducing international students to institutions and available programs.

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies on activities that can improve the productivity and effectiveness of international students facing difficulties in higher education. While most students reported few problems gaining access to Rowan resources, more intercultural activities should be planned and implemented to strengthen the international program and support this community.

Discussion and Conclusion

Several research studies have been conducted to explore the issues faced by international students while living in the United States using different survey reports and qualitative interviews. The findings from interviews have revealed that international students experience social issues, academic

challenges, and cultural adjustments. Educational problems mainly involve communication barriers between international students and professors, fellow students, and administrative staff of colleges and universities. As a result of these obstacles, they may face social isolation when they have to take part in various group activities. Moreover, living in the United States can be a culture shock for many international students, and they have to deal with brand-new ways of thinking and behaving (Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009).

The United States has played a significant role as a world leader in educating students from across the globe, with a large number of universities and many highly ranked institutions. After World War II, U.S. foreign policy aimed to develop better connections with other countries and therefore emphasized educational relations at the international level. To achieve this purpose, the United States has welcomed thousands of international students each year, and the number has risen as institutions have offered different forms of assistance, aid, and scholarships to accommodate more international students. The United States is a dream destination for many students seeking to continue and complete their studies because of its highly esteemed and established universities. They may initially perceive these educational institutions as ideal places, arrive with high levels of energy and enthusiasm, and fail to anticipate the limitations and challenges they may experience while spending several years there.

Future Implications for Study

Most students thought that a person needs to be flexible enough to live in the United States because the culture may differ from that of their home country. One student thought there should be an intermediate English program for international students to make the adjustment process smoother. Ultimately, getting out of one's comfort zone is a key part of adapting to challenges in America for international students. To understand the needs of these students, improve their experiences, and increase their chances of success, there is a need for more extensive qualitative research related to the difficulties of international students in higher education in the United States. The relationship between student integration into U.S. culture and student success suggests that more attention should be paid to social integration and that further research is needed. Longitudinal studies over one or two years could also be conducted to determine levels of retention and student progress.

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